

Delta Conservation Framework

As a long-term, high-level framework for sustainable conservation and management of Delta ecosystems, the *Delta Conservation Framework* provides a collective conservation vision for the Delta. It is based on a foundation of direct stakeholder input, a wide variety of existing plans, and science. It promotes an approach for Delta ecosystem conservation that integrates with the human landscape and unique culture of the Delta.

Following the initiation of California *WaterFix* and *EcoRestore* in 2015, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) committed to leading this high-level planning effort to advance the conservation of the Delta, Yolo Bypass, and Suisun Marsh. The *Delta Conservation Framework* is a wide-ranging collaborative effort developed in collaboration with the Natural Resources Agency, Delta Stewardship Council (Council), Delta Conservancy, Department of Water Resources, Delta Protection Commission, and California *EcoRestore*. CDFW also solicited input from a wide range of stakeholders including the Delta Counties Coalition, the Central Valley Joint Venture, federal and regional agencies, NGOs, consulting firms, and Delta landowners and residents through individual meetings and a series of six public workshops. The *Delta Conservation Framework* is founded upon input from participating agencies and stakeholders and offers approaches for stakeholder integration, multi-benefit focused conservation, and adaptive management of Delta ecosystem function with services for both human and natural communities and benefits to listed species.

The *Delta Conservation Framework* builds on prior planning efforts to foster ecosystem resilience through 2050. The Framework's long-term, landscape-scale conservation overarching goals, strategies, and objectives strive to increase public awareness and involvement in Delta conservation and advance science-based conservation practices through 2050.

Conservation

The *Delta Conservation Framework* defines *Delta conservation* as achieving system-wide multi-benefits by integrating protection, enhancement, reestablishment and reconciliation of ecological function of resilient Delta ecosystems with watershed and agricultural sustainability, flood protection, recreation, and other drivers.

VISION

In 2050, the Delta is composed of resilient natural and managed ecosystems situated within a mosaic of towns and agricultural landscapes, where people prosper and healthy wildlife communities thrive.

Strategies in the *Delta Conservation Framework* seek to reestablish ecosystem function and resiliency to future changes in the Delta, including climate change. These strategies are intended to be implemented through an adaptive management framework, where the suite of Council performance measures will serve as tools for assessing progress and rate of change and status of species and ecosystem resilience.

The *Delta Conservation Framework* encourages the use of inclusive, collaborative *regional stakeholder partnerships* to integrate stakeholder perspectives into *regional-scale conservation strategies*. It also serves as the long-term continuation of existing initiatives, including California *EcoRestore*, and addresses solutions to conservation challenges including potential regulatory conflicts. Going forward, the *Delta Conservation Framework* will inform the amendment of the ecosystem elements of the Delta Plan and State funding priorities.

Based on the central premise that the long-term conservation of Delta ecosystems will benefit people and the environment, the guiding principles that underlie the *Delta Conservation Framework* focus on:

1. ***CONSIDER PEOPLE AND PLACE:*** Recognize the *Delta as an evolving place* with unique agricultural, cultural, recreational, and natural resource values.
2. ***BUILD COMMUNITY AND FOSTER PUBLIC EDUCATION AND OUTREACH:*** Support outreach, education, and communication across interests, where participants are encouraged to hear all perspectives, interact with respect and humility, and shift the focus away from strict traditional roles toward a better understanding of the big picture to promote multiple benefit solutions.
3. ***FOSTER MULTIPLE BENEFITS:*** Integrate conservation with other land use practices, where possible, to provide simultaneous benefits for wildlife and people at a landscape scale over the long term.
4. ***PROMOTE ECOLOGICAL PROCESS-BASED ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION:*** Focus conservation practices on reestablishing natural ecological processes and promoting the functions and adaptive capacity of Delta ecosystems, rather than restoring the Delta to pre-Gold Rush Era conditions.
5. ***PROMOTE ECOSYSTEM SERVICES:*** Highlight the societal values of the many services healthy ecosystems provide to humans by emphasizing these services as benefits to society. Delta ecosystem services include open space, opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism, pollination services, flood protection, clean water, clean air, biodiversity, and others.
6. ***MAKE DECISIONS GROUNDED IN SCIENCE:*** In light of continuing ecosystem stressors and accelerating changes from climate shifts and other drivers, as well as changeable socioeconomic conditions, utilize scientific approaches to inform and evaluate conservation practices and projects and conservation-related human needs.
7. ***REALIZE MECHANISMS FOR INCREASED EFFICIENCY:*** Utilize processes that minimize project costs, and provide consistent and integrated tools to support decision-making, evaluation of success, environmental compliance, and permitting; build on past planning documents and existing efforts.
8. ***ACKNOWLEDGE LONG-TERM FUNDING NEEDS:*** Recognize that long-term funding is necessary for successful Delta conservation and management through 2050.